

## GOVERNOR BARBOUR SIGNS BILL TO 'UPGRADE' PUBLIC EDUCATION

SALTILLO, Mississippi – Flanked by students, teachers and administrators at Saltillo High School in Lee County, Governor Haley Barbour on Tuesday signed into law major reforms that he proposed to upgrade public education.

The bill Governor Barbour signed, Senate Bill 2602, contains a number of reforms designed to enhance public education, which he stressed is “the number one economic development issue and the number one quality of life issue in our state.”

Governor Barbour said 62 percent of the Mississippi budget goes for education. “Thanks to a multi-year commitment our public school teachers are making 30 percent more than five years ago. State spending on K-12 education is 7.2 percent, or \$143 million, higher than last year. Per student spending in our public schools is more than \$7,000 this year, a record amount,” he said.

He also noted that after several years of declining spending, more funding has been appropriated for universities and community colleges.

“Building a stronger education system has always been about more than money. UpGrade is not about funding; it’s about fundamentals. The bills I am signing here today are integral pieces of a concept that has become a reality,” Governor Barbour said.

The proposals under the umbrella of the UpGrade Education reforms were developed with strong support from Governor Barbour’s 250 member Teachers Advisory Commission.

Among the reforms are these:

- Liberate successful schools from repetitive bureaucracy. Schools that achieve Level 4 and 5 accreditation ratings will be freed from some of the cumbersome oversight from Jackson. As a result, the State Department of Education can better focus its resources on the lower performing schools, where the attention is most needed.

- Home rule. Home rule gives all districts the operational freedom they need to do what we all are working toward: higher student achievement. With the passage of UpGrade, local educators now have the freedom, authority, and explicit encouragement to think and act creatively to raise student achievement.

- Focus on dropout prevention. Nearly 40 percent of Mississippi school children drop out before they graduate. UpGrade creates a position within the Department of Education whose responsibility it will be to dramatically lower this number in the next three years.

- Prioritize teacher recruitment and retention. This includes establishment of a teacher pay for performance program that rewards schools that show the greatest increases in student test scores from year to year, and establishment of a middle school mentor teacher corps that would pay \$1,000 to teachers who are willing to serve in positions to strengthen policies on discipline.

- Redesign high schools. A recent national report suggested that 75 percent of high school dropouts did so with passing grades, shattering the myth that they couldn't handle the academics. The facts are that students become disengaged and are not challenged by the curriculum. UpGrade makes significant changes by doing the following:

- Establishes a dual credit system. Beginning next school year, if a student at, for example, Saltillo High School wants to take a math or science class needed for graduation at Tupelo's Advanced Education Center (where Ole Miss, MUW, and Itawamba Community College offer courses) they can do so and earn credit towards their college degree at the same time.

- Requires that Advance Placement (AP) courses be made available in every school district

- Creates the Mississippi Virtual Public School where students can take courses for credit that might not be offered in their own school. This initiative takes advantage of investments in public education by corporations to expand the use of technology, online education and distance learning so every child can have access to the best education.

“We must constantly pursue innovative, creative policies that help us achieve greater increases in learning. UpGrade does that,” Governor Barbour said.